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Fetes de la Nuit

by CHARLES L. MEE

Prologue

Juliette Binoche narrates in French gobbledygook:

"The human species confront each other,
but do they see a stranger or themselves?
because how can one tell
in the structure of everyday life
whether we live on earth or in heaven
because: these sudden appearances of life on earth
who knows?
it is such a mystery
and the human species, she will never know
so it is for us only to live
and to thank god for it
or not
or not
if one thinks god is not to be thanked
well, then, OK,
we can thank ourselves
or each other
or Michel Foucault I don't know
even though it's not for me to understand
why he should always be taking the credit
for something human
when he himself

often he didn't know
he was only guessing
and sometimes it seems to me
he was so far off the mark
it was crazy
why people would give him the time of day
or even say hello to him
when they saw him in a cafe
and even still for the life each day
we know it is the miracle
something that is so amazing
for which we are so grateful
and simply
astonished."

1. Fete

The music of Les Negresses Vertes
(the fabulously celebratory song
"Sous le Soleil de Bodega" from the album Famille Nombreuse).

A big violent, sexy, romantic dance,
you know the ones,
like a violent tango
where guys drag the girls by their hair
women slap the men and then kiss them
women drag men by their hair
women drag women by their hair
men drag men
men slap men
women slap women
women kiss women
men kiss men

2. l'amour

When all the dancers leave in a whirl,
a young man and a young woman are revealed
suddenly
alone
kissing
and it is precisely the kiss of the famous photograph by Doisneau.
The man, Henry, is a young African-American in Paris.
Yvette, the woman, is French.

[This kiss can recur later from time to time throughout the piece, with the same couple or other couples. Sometimes the couple is walking from one side of the stage to the other, suddenly stop, take the pose, kiss, and then move on. Sometimes they come from opposite sides, stop when they meet, take the pose, and then move on together. And, again, the genders shift — men kiss men, women kiss women, women take hold of men and kiss them.]

HENRY

I wonder:
would you marry me
or
would you have a coffee with me
and think of having a conversation
that would lead to marriage?

YVETTE

Oh.
Well,
a coffee with you
I would have a coffee with you.

HENRY

You are free now?

YVETTE

Free now? No, well, no
right now
I am busy.

HENRY

OK then maybe later this evening?

YVETTE

Well, later this evening also I am busy.

HENRY

Or late supper.

Or breakfast tomorrow

or lunch or tea in the afternoon

or a movie

or dinner the day after

Thursday for lunch

or Friday dinner

or perhaps you would go for the weekend with me

to my parents' home in Provence

or we could stop along the way

and find a little place for ourselves

to be alone.

YVETTE

I don't think I can be alone.

HENRY

With me?

Or by yourself?

You don't like to be alone by yourself?

YVETTE

No, I mean with you this weekend.

HENRY

Oh.

Or then just we could

have coffee over and over again

every day

until we get to know one another

and we have the passage of the seasons

in the cafe

we could celebrate our anniversary
and then perhaps you would forget
that you are not married to me
and we can have a child.

YVETTE
A child?

HENRY
Because
don't you think
after we have been together for a year
it will be time to start to think of these things?

YVETTE
We haven't been together for a day.

HENRY
You know, I have known many women.
I mean, I don't mean to say....

YVETTE
No.

HENRY
I mean just
you know
my mother, my grandmother
my sisters
and also women I have known romantically
and then, too, friends,
and even merely acquaintances
but you know
in life
one meets many people
and it seems to me
we know so much of another person
in the first few moments we meet
not from what a person says alone

but from the way they hold their head
how they listen
what they do with their hand as they speak
or when they are silent
and years later
when these two people break up
they say
I should have known from the beginning
in truth
I did know from the beginning
I saw it in her, or in him
the moment we met
but I tried to repress the knowledge
because it wasn't useful at the time
because,
for whatever reason
I just wanted to go to bed with her as fast as I could
or I was lonely
and so I pretended I didn't notice
even though I did
exactly the person she was from the first moment
I knew
and so it is with you
and I think probably it is the same for you with me
we know one another
right now from the first moment
we know so much about one another in just this brief time
and we have known many people
and for myself
I can tell
you are one in a million
and I want to marry you
I want to marry you
and have children with you
and grow old together
so I am begging you
just have a coffee with me.

YVETTE
OK.

HENRY
When will you do this?

YVETTE
Right now.

HENRY
Oh.
Oh, good.
Good.

[he kisses her hand]

Good.

3. Plaisir

At once, we hear two sopranos sing the cat meow duet from Rossini or Berlioz (yes, music has been composed for two sopranos singing "meow, meow" over and over again—Rossini's version is Duetto buffo de due gatti from Peches de vieillesse; I don't remember where the Berlioz comes from, but it is the better, more stupendously insane surreal version) while

LARTIGUE comes in wearing a chef's hat
and cooks a crepe

and

4. Vin

four waiters, each opening a bottle of wine
a performance piece

with corkscrew, arrogance, white napkin, black suit
each one doing it in his/her own way

and finally,
after Lartigue has finished the crepe
one of the waiters takes the crepe
very respectfully, as though it were almost sacred, and exits with it,
and Lartigue speaks
to Henry and Yvette now sitting at a table:

5. Le Bistro

LARTIGUE, THE CHEF

If I could make a suggestion.

There is one dish here

that you cannot find anywhere else in France,

or perhaps the world,

the Canard Apicius.

The recipe dates back to the Romans

two thousand years ago.

It is a duck,

but

a duck like no other duck,

a duck roasted in honey and spices, but

honey from the Bees of Nimes that feed only

on the pink tea rose

in the late afternoon

a duck

in ecstasy.

You will remember this duck

for the rest of your life.

You will tell

your grandchildren

about this duck.

Music.

And
waiters return and
a full meal is served in a bistro
by two of the waiters, Roland and Georges,

while the other two waiters (Barbesco and Jean Francois) sit
and join the others at table,
Lartigue cooking right there,
a whole meal cooked
with people around a big table—

Henry, a young African-American man
Yvette, a French woman
Barbesco, an Arab man
Jean Francois, a French man
Catherine, a French woman
Sumiko, a Japanese woman
Nanette, a French woman

—telling stories
or just having
the following philosophical conversation:

BARBESCO

One can't help but notice that the chefs these days
are avoiding the red pumpkin.
I see the red pumpkin has disappeared completely.

JEAN FRANCOIS
Has it?

BARBESCO
Oh, yes.

JEAN FRANCOIS
You know, what I would say

I would say this would be interesting if it were in any way true
but it is not possible to construe what you say
as having any truth at all.

BARBESCO

What do you mean?

JEAN FRANCOIS

Well, in my experience
the red pumpkin is everywhere
in photographs in the magazines,
in cooking books,
on the tables one sees as one comes into restaurants:
the flat shape,
that touch of red.
It's obvious.
Because of its aesthetic touch.

BARBESCO

Ah, for its aesthetic touch, yes, of course
but that is to say almost that one still uses wallpaper
or end tables
that one sees red pumpkins used almost as furniture
of course, so much the worse.
But as a food item
no
I don't think so.
The same thing has happened to the aubergine.

JEAN FRANCOIS

No. To the fig, yes,
but to the aubergine, no.

BARBESCO

To me it is incontrovertible.
It is like the facades of the little shops
which now they all look alike
whereas when I was a boy
each facade had its own character.

JEAN FRANCOIS

Do you mean to say
you cannot tell the difference
between a bookshop and a cafe?

BARBESCO

No.

JEAN FRANCOIS

You would walk into a bookshop and order a coffee?

BARBESCO

It could happen.

JEAN FRANCOIS

Not to me.

BARBESCO

To anyone.

JEAN FRANCOIS

Not to me.

NANETTE (interrupting, smoothing it over)

Everywhere you look
you see unhappy people.
Complaining. Bickering.
How do you explain this?
There is no reason.

[pointedly, to Henry]

It's not like in America.

In France,

there is no reason to fear pregnancy and childbirth.

Because they are natural

they are a normal part of love and sex.

In America, I am told, they are to be feared.

And this is because in America

the idea of sex is filled with fear and shame and guilt
whereas in France
I know many women who think
if it feels ecstatic to conceive a baby
why should it not feel ecstatic to deliver one?
And so, in childbirth,
they have orgasms.
Probably this is how God felt
creating the planet.
There was a woman in St. Remy de Provence
who was giving birth at home in a portable birth tub
and feeling very sexy and loving with her partner.
And each time she had a contraction she would cry out,
'Oh, baby, I love it. More...more!'
Her windows were open because it was July,
and soon a crowd gathered outside her home.
And when the baby was born
with shouts of 'Yes!!! Yes!!! Oh, my God, yes!!!'
her neighbors gave her a great round of applause.

So what happens then?
How do you explain it?
How can there be unhappiness in these circumstances?
Because,
in spite of it all,
it is the children.
The boy arrives, and the man feels jealous
so soon enough you have the story of Kronos
and Abraham
I don't even mention Oedipus or World War I.

JEAN FRANCOIS speaks (in a moment: below).
As he speaks, the others fall silent,
listening to him.
One by one—
as he sinks deeper and deeper
into the existential French cafe literateur—
they become bored with him,
rolling their eyes,

looking at one another.
One by one they get up and leave,
until he is alone in his despair.

JEAN FRANCOIS

This morning
I woke up shattered.
I was shattered by the fear
I had experienced in my dream.
I was haggard.
I was burning with fever.

[this is where someone begins to exchange looks
with someone else]

I did not touch the breakfast
that my mother in law set down at my bedside.
I still felt like throwing up.
The feeling had not really subsided for the past two days.
I sent out for a bottle of bad champagne.

[this is where eyes are rolled]

I drank a glass of it iced.
After a few minutes I got up to vomit.
After vomiting I went back to bed.
I felt some relief,
but the nausea lost no time in returning.

[one person rises to leave]

I started shivering.
My teeth were chattering.
I was obviously sick—
sick in an extremely disagreeable way.

[two others rise to leave]

I sank back into a kind of dreadful sleep.
Things started becoming unstuck.

[everyone leaves]

Dark, hideous, shapeless things
that it was absolutely necessary to nail down.
There was no way of doing this.
My life was falling to pieces.

6. The Existential Accordionist

Jean Francois plays the accordion.
Or else
the funny looking lady who played the accordion in front of the Cafe de Flore—she
was in the Eric Rohmer movie, Les Rendez-vous de Paris —plays and sings.

7. The Life Class

A man or a woman comes in
matter-of-factly takes off all his/her clothes
poses naked for an art class.
Students enter one by one, with drawing pads,
take their places here and there.
All the students draw silently.

A second model enters,
matter-of-factly takes off all his/her clothes,
and poses with the first model.

And then,
while all the others continue quietly to draw
the second model rubs his/her body
all up and down the body of the first model:
side against side

butt to butt
butt down along the back
butt sliding excruciatingly slowly and sensuously down one leg
genitals to chest
genitals to neck
genitals to shoulder
arms intertwined
rolling over one another
sitting in one another's laps for several moments at a time—
this should get intensely sexual—
it should not fear intimacy, eroticism,
nakedness on stage as it's never been seen before,
contact between naked bodies
as has never been done outside a sex club—
except it should remain as aesthetically pristine and beautiful
as a Renaissance pen and ink or red chalk anatomical study—
indeed,
we ought from time to time
to be shocked to recognize the pose of a Mantegna drawing
or a Michelangelo drawing
as a couple of arms freeze for a moment in an upraised gesture
or one figure bows and freezes like Rodin's thinker.

After a while,
the two nudes—
a man and a woman, two women, or two men,
whoever they have been—
turn matter-of-factly
put on their clothes,
and walk out—
employees paid by the hour
whose shift is over.

The students close their sketch pads and leave.

A woman and a piano are left alone on stage.

8. The Avant Garde

The woman sits at the piano.
She composes herself.
She is ready to play the piano.
She takes some dental floss from its case,
and she flosses the strings of the piano to make a sound.
At a point, she stops,
turns the page of music, and resumes.
She bows and exits.

9. Jardin du Luxembourg

BARBESCO, as a tour guide
This is the Jardin du Luxembourg
a very important place
this is where I had my first kiss
Mademoiselle Beart
She was my teacher.
I was nine years old.
And so:
she kissed me.
And there, by the pond
where the woman rents the little sailboats
my first time to put my hand on a woman's breast.
It was Annette.
Uh,
very nice.
Over there
next to the marionette theatre
it was Chantal
the first time I was dumped big time
I don't know what I did
she left me standing right there.
I think I did nothing wrong
but she never explained
and so
I will never know.

And there
where the woman takes the little children for the ride
on the pony
it was Simone
my first time my hand up a woman's skirt on her ass
it was
extraordinary
she kiss me
she was a lovely person
I miss her.
She could have been my wife
but she wasn't.
It was her choice.
Over there, by the tennis court,
it was Gabrielle
behind these trees
we made love
in the late evening
dusk
like a dream
that's all
like a dream.
Gabrielle.

Up there
next to the ice cream kiosk
it was Sylvie
we made love standing up
in the middle of the day
I don't know
I think there were many people around us
they didn't seem to notice
or else
they thought it was normal.
Sylvie and I
we made love everywhere
not just here in the Jardin de Luxembourg
but you know
on the bank of the river

in the taxi
in the women's room at Cafe de Flore
she is my wife
we are married 22 years
I am completely faithful to her
and she is to me
And we come here every Sunday
almost every Sunday to the park
just to take a walk
that's all
because
we remember.
And now, if you will follow me,
we will come this way
and walk just to the Cafe de la Mairie.
I will show you the church of St. Sulpice
where I had my first encounter with a man.

10. The Park Bench

A man and a woman at opposite ends of a park bench.
It could be Jean Francois and Nanette.
Or it could be Henry and Yvette.
A stranger walks by, stops,
sits between the man and woman.

As he sits, the man on the bench,
in moving aside, touches the stranger's arm.

The stranger hesitates,
turns to the woman,
and touches her arm
just as he has been touched.

The woman looks at the stranger,
and touches his arm in return.

The stranger turns back to the man
and touches his arm
in just the way the woman touched him.

The man, in return, touches the stranger again.

And so it begins:

The man and the woman caress, kiss, stroke, and fondle
the stranger, who, each time,
turns and passes on the caress from man to woman
and woman back to man
so the man and woman make love through him
to each other.

This begins in silence, and,
after a while,
a torch singer enters and steps to a microphone.

11. The Torch Singer

It could be Yvette. It could be Nanette. Sings Piaf.

If the sky should fall into the sea
and the stars fade all around me
all because what we have known, dear
I will sing a hymn to love

we have lived and reigned we two alone
in a world that seemed our very own
with its memory ever grateful
just for you I'll sing a hymn to love

I remember each embrace
the smile that lights your face
and my heart begins to sing
your arms-----
your eyes-----
and my heart begins to sing

If one day we had to say goodbye
and our love should fade away and die
in my heart you will remain, dear
and I'll sing a hymn to love.

etc.

Or else she sings *Je ne regrette rien*
or *La Vie en Rose*.

In any case,
while she sings
a couple dances in a pool of light.

12. L'amour encore

SUMIKO

I'm glad to see you again.

CATHERINE

So you say.

And yet

I don't know how it could be true.

SUMIKO

How could it not be true?

CATHERINE

Because if you were glad to see me
you would never have left me.

SUMIKO

Of course I would.

CATHERINE

No, because

if you love someone

you don't leave them.
You hold onto them for dear life
you hold onto them forever
unless you are a stupid person
which I don't think you are
so
what else can I think
except you never really loved me
I was just another one of your flings along the way
whereas I loved you
I knew
if you love someone
you don't let them go

SUMIKO
And yet you did.

CATHERINE
I never did.

SUMIKO
You said:
if one day you are going to leave me
then go now
don't just keep tormenting me.

CATHERINE
And so?

JACQUEINE
And so.
It's not that I left you.

CATHERINE
Excuse me.
I didn't leave you.
And yet, you are not with me.
What else happened?

SUMIKO

It turned out
we were at different points in our lives
we couldn't go on.

CATHERINE

I could have gone on.

SUMIKO

Shall we talk about something else?

CATHERINE

I see
in the world
people have wars and they die
entire countries come to an end
Etienne has died of cancer

SUMIKO

I didn't know.

CATHERINE

How could you?
And yet
there it is.
And one day I will die
and so will you.
And yet
you could leave me.
I don't understand.
I will never understand
how it is if you have only one life to live
and you find your own true love
the person all your life you were meant to find
and your only job then was to cherish that person
and care for that person
and never let go
but it turns out
you can still think

for some reason
because this or that
you end it
you end it forever
you end it for the only life you will ever live on earth.
Maybe if you would be reincarnated
and you could come back to life again and again a dozen times
then this would make sense
to throw away your only chance for love in this life
because you would have another chance in another life
but when this is your only chance
how can this make sense?

Do you think
there will ever be a time
when we could get back together?

SUMIKO
No.

CATHERINE
Not ever?

SUMIKO
No.

CATHERINE
Not ever at all
even ever?

SUMIKO
No.

CATHERINE
And yet
this is so hard for me to accept.

More than anything
I love to lie in bed with you at night

and look at your naked back
and stroke your back slowly
from your neck to your cocyx
and let my fingers fan out
and drift over your smooth buttock
and slip slowly down along your thigh
to your sweet knee
only to return again
coming up the back of your thigh
hesitating a moment
to let my fingers rest in the sweet valley
at the very top of your thigh, just below your buttock
and so slowly up along the small of your back
to your shoulder blade
and then to let your hair tickle my face
as I put my lips to your shoulder
and kiss you and kiss you and kiss you forever
this is what I call heaven
and what I hope will last forever

[Sumiko stands to leave]

SUMIKO

I love you, Catherine.

I have never loved anyone in my life as I have loved you
and I know I never will.

But we cannot be together.

[she leaves;

Catherine watches her go.]

13. Death with Cello

Catherine dies of love, to the sound of a cello,
or while she plays a cello,
or while a cellist, onstage, plays.

14. Gauloises

Ten people smoking
or just holding cigarettes in their hands
looking defiant about it
they come in, light up,
hold their cigarettes looking out at audience
and, after a while, they leave.
Or else
they leave as noted below:

JEAN FRANCOIS speaks (text below).
As he speaks, he just leaves his cigarette,
whether lit or unlit,
stuck to his upper lip.
As he speaks, the others, silent,
become increasingly attentive to him.
And then, one by one
they become bored with him,
rolling their eyes,
looking at one another.
One by one they get up and leave,
until he is alone in his despair.

JEAN FRANCOIS
I stayed in Spain with Dorothea
until the end of October.
Xenie went back to France with Lazare.
Dorothea was getting better from day to day.
I used to take her out in the sunshine during the afternoon.
We had gone to live in a fishing village.
At the end of October
we had no money left.

[this is where people begin to glance at one another]

Dorothea had to return to Germany.
I was to take her as far as Frankfurt.
We reached Trier on a Sunday morning, the first of November.

We had to wait for the banks to open next day.

[this is where the first rolling of eyes occurs]

It was an afternoon of rainy weather,
but we couldn't stay cooped up in our hotel.
We walked through the countryside
up to a height that overhung the Moselle valley.
It was cold.

[someone rises to walk out]

Rain was starting to fall.
Dorothea was wearing a gray cloth traveling coat.

[a couple of others walk out]

The wind had rumpled her hair.
She was damp with rain.

[everyone walks out]

Our faces were lashed by the wind.
Dorothea and I felt we no longer existed.

15. How it is

We hear a recording of a six or seven year old girl
playing MacDowell's "To a Wild Rose" on the piano,
with all the hesitations, uncertainty, and sweetness
inherent in that.

CATHERINE

I think
how it is
maybe I have never been able to have empathy
or, if I felt it, to show it to anyone
and this is why

I have gone from woman to woman
nothing has ever worked out for me
and I have blamed the women I have been with
thinking always I loved them
but they didn't love me back
but perhaps all this time
they thought I didn't love them
that I was cold and distant
when they were sad
I withdrew
I never knew what to do
I didn't know how to help
I knew it would be wrong to say
oh, let's do this, or let's do that
to solve the problem
because this is what men always do
and this is wrong
women hate this
because the point is not to fix the problem
necessarily
but just to say
oh, I know how you feel
and actually for that to be true
and I thought this was true for me
but perhaps it never was
and every woman I have ever been with
has felt I had no feeling for them
their feelings were greeted with indifference
or worse
it's been a nightmare for them
and I haven't known it
and so I have ruined every love I ever had
because even though
all these years
I thought of myself as a very empathetic person
and an expressive person
in fact
I wasn't.

16. The Intellectual's Press Conference

many reporters asking questions of Barbesco

(trying to get the great man's attention) M. Barbesco....

(trying to get the great man's attention) M. Barbesco....

Monsieur Barbesco: Do you believe in love?

Of course. It's the only thing one can believe in.

(trying to get the great man's attention) M. Barbesco....

(trying to get the great man's attention) M. Barbesco....

Do French and Americans have the same idea of love?

You can't compare the two.

American women dominate their men.

French women do not—yet.

Who is more moral? An unfaithful woman or a man who deserts her?

The woman.

Is there a difference between eroticism and love?

No. Not much.

Eroticism is a form of love.

And love is a form of eroticism.

Does the woman have a role in today's society?

If she is charming, well-dressed, and wears dark glasses.

How many men can a woman love in a lifetime?

(with the fingers of his hand he shows

5+5+5+5+2+3+5—and then says:

More than that.

What is important?

Two things are important.

For men it's women.

For women, money.

Why do you write only about love?

Because

love

love begins a discourse

with anxiety

remorse

longing

connivance

dependency

embarrassment

drama

brutality

identification

unknowability

jealousy

langour

vengefulness

monstrousness

cruelty

insomnia

crying

gossip

loneliness

tenderness

isolation

truth

the will to possess

lying

remembrance

suicide

ravishment

because
in love
we come to know what it is to be a human being
what it is to be human today
because
if we humans see who we are in our relationships with others—
in all our relationships—erotic, poetic, political, economic,
still the way we know one another most intimately and deeply
how we are when we are free
and how we are unable to be free
it is in our love for one another.
And so, if we are to know what it is to be human
we know that best when know how we are in love
what sort of species we have become in our time
by what sort of love we've become capable of.

Is this true of peoples
as well as individuals?

Of course.

Is Paris the city of eternal love?

Is Berlin?

What is your greatest ambition?

To become capable of a great love
and then to die.

Thank you, M. Barbesco.
Thank you.
Thank you, M. Barbesco.

Not at all.

17. Joy and Despair

A man, fully clothed, jacket and tie, with an inner tube around his middle, and fishing boots up to the inner tube, a little hat and dark aviator's goggles, comes in, looks around, goes this way and that, finally goes to the edge of the stage, right or left or way upstage, stops, hesitates, leaps, and a huge splash is made offstage as he jumps into the lake.

18. Plus du Vin

while a castrato sings a Rossini aria
five people Suzuki stomp grapes in a vat.

19. Foreigners

cafe talk

SUMIKO

They don't like foreigners, you know.

HENRY

Yes, well

they love to hate Americans,
that's been my experience.

SUMIKO

They don't like anything to be different.

They have a way to speak

and they have a way to drive a car

and they have a way to make bread

and they have a certain hour for breakfast

and after a certain hour

you cannot get a cup of cafe au lait

because the cafe au lait

that is for early in the morning

and if you get up too late

and you ask for cafe au lait at eleven o'clock

they just treat you with contempt.
Because then they know:
you don't know anything.

HENRY

And they hate you when you walk in the stores,
and rattle stuff around
and pick everything up,
and then just walk out without saying thank you,
you know?

SUMIKO

Yes. Well.
They would hate you for that in Japan, too.

HENRY

They would?

SUMIKO

Oh, yes.
Because they think
when you go into a store
it's like walking into someone's home,
and when you walk out you better say, "thank you",
or else they hate you.

HENRY

Right.

SUMIKO

And they hate the McDonalds.
I was talking to a taxi driver and he was saying
"fuck mcdonalds!" to me, like, just like,
you know
like ranting and raving about how America is like
raping the culture and France and all this stuff.
As though it would be my fault.

HENRY

They're really snotty.
I find the people very snotty.

SUMIKO

At Charles deGaulle....
it might have been deGaulle, okay?....
some passenger...
somebody left their bag unattended for about three minutes,
and I watched it.
I just kind of watched it
and within seconds after I noticed it, the police came...
they covered it...
and they blew it up
they covered it,
they had this special cover,
and they blew it up.
Because they thought:
this doesn't belong here.

HENRY

Well,
people are a little, what you call, snobby, because...
well, it's Paris,
that's all
and they think
that's like heaven.

SUMIKO

That's what I think, too.
I like to sit in the cafes
you can sit for hours and hours in a cafe and watch people go by
and i go to every graveyard i can.
great graveyards.
and they have catacombs.
the catacombs of paris.
you walk for miles.
its so spooky.
the weirdest tour you'll ever go on!

you've gotta go on this tour.
the french resistance.....
the french resistance used this catacomb area
during the occupation?!!
it's all underground.
and you'll see signs like this is
from the churchyard of st. something,
and there'll be 300 skulls stacked up on the side.
That's what I say
I love Paris.

HENRY

You can say anything in French and it sounds better.
For instance:
(American accent)
I had known Betty one week.
We made love every night.

Not much, right? Even a little cheesy.
Now try this:
J'ai connue Betty une semaine.
Nous avons fait l'amour tous les soirs.

Sexy, no?
Even a bad French accent:
(Bad French accent)
I had known Betty one week.
We made love every night.

It's not fair, is it?

20. A Metaphysical Question

A beautiful woman enters (in lingerie?)
There is silence from everyone.
They turn to look at her.
A photographer enters hurriedly and shoots a dozen pictures of her.

PHOTOGRAPHER

OK.

Play with fire.

[she does]

OK. OK.

Reveal a Secret.

[she does]

OK. OK.

Play

on his nerves.

[she does]

Yes. Good.

OK.

Yes. Good.

Now:

Pretend timidity.

Good. Good.

Now:

Get him going

Surround him

OK.

Pose a metaphysical problem

Good. Good.

OK.

Now:

Feign indifference.

[She exits.]

OK. OK. Good.

OK, Michelle, come back.

Michelle.

OK, Michelle.

Michelle.

Michelle.

[He goes after her.]

21. Lecons des choses: Corsets

A woman wearing a corset enters
knowing she is incredibly beautiful
smirking at how gorgeous she is
how good she looks in her corset
showing herself off,
caressing her own curves
walking up and down
smiling directly at the audience.

Another woman enters. Ditto.

Another woman enters. Ditto.

A man enters. Ditto.

22. The Shrug

a performance piece of ten people
doing the characteristic French shrug
along with the pursed lips and the blowing out of cheeks

23. McDonald's

YVETTE

This Mcdonald's, it makes me so mad.

HENRY

Why is that?

YVETTE

Because I think it is such crap.

HENRY

People like it.

YVETTE

I don't like it.

HENRY

Possibly not, but some people do
and for them....

YVETTE

They should get to know better.

HENRY

You know, I think, some people would say
tolerance is a good thing.

YVETTE

I wouldn't.

HENRY

Maybe this is what is wrong with us.

YVETTE

What's that? That you have no strong convictions?

HENRY

Exactly what I mean.

YVETTE

I can't help if you have no strong conviction.

HENRY

I do have strong convictions.

YVETTE

You just said you didn't.

HENRY

I didn't.

YVETTE

I said what, you have no strong convictions,
and you said exactly.

HENRY

Exactly the trouble.

YVETTE

That's what I said.

HENRY

No, no, exactly the trouble is that you think,
if a person is respectful of another person
then he has no strong convictions.

YVETTE

That's not what I think.

HENRY

That's how you behave.

YVETTE

Look. You are the one who is behaving now.

HENRY

I am not behaving. You are always behaving. This is how you are.
what?
how can anyone talk to you?

YVETTE

Go ahead, say what you mean.

HENRY

What I mean is: never mind. With us, it's finished!
That's my strong conviction.

YVETTE

You don't mean it.

HENRY

I do!

YVETTE

You won't stick with it.

HENRY

I will.

YVETTE

You'll see, you'll come back to me.

24. l'Amour Toujours

NANETTE speaks (below).

As she speaks, the others fall silent,
listening to her.

One by one
they become bored by her,
rolling their eyes,
looking at one another.
One by one they get up and leave,
until she is alone.

NANETTE

My Master Pierre has a particular method of training
both cruel and refined
expressed through a kind of caress of the whip
or the cane
before the sharp smacks.

[this is where someone begins to exchange looks
with someone else]

He knew better than anyone
how to train me.
After the last stroke
he would caress my inflamed buttocks furtively.

[this is where eyes are rolled]

And then they ordered me to go down on all fours
I recognized, in their softness,
the hands of a woman
and with some adroitness
they opened my sex

[one person rises to leave]

and while each of them in turn used me
their fingers and tongues and cocks
penetrating my body from every direction
making me reach an orgasm with a suddenness
that staggered me
as if I had been blown down by a gust of pleasure
that nothing could delay

[two others rise to leave]

and then I was placed in a hole constructed in the wall
but by then I had begun to feel such a pressing need
I asked if I might be taken first to the toilet
but instead a small bowl was placed just beneath me
and, as I realized what was meant by this
an irrepressible panic swept over me
and my bladder freed itself instinctively

[another person leaves]

I would never have imagined
that I could not refrain from urinating on the ground
or even beyond that
that then they would force me to sniff my own urine
or order me to drink it

[everyone gets up at once and leaves]

but not daring to protest
I began to lap up,
without swallowing, the pale and still lukewarm liquid,
and to my intense surprise
I found
I liked it.

25. Lecons des Choses: hats

Ten women (and transvestites, or, also men) wear fabulous hats with ostrich
feathers and flowers and lace ruffles and fruits and sailboats and whatnot, while,
over a loudspeaker, we hear this:

The coffee bean grows in the ground
because
it's as simple as that
everything comes from the earth.
And then what?
Then we know.
It is picked, it is brought to the dock,
it is loaded on the boat
and it comes to be roasted.
And when this happened
for the first time
for the first time ever that there was coffee in France
which was in the 18th century
it changed everything.
Why?
Because now it was the fashion.
It was no longer the fashion to drink so much alcohol

and get sleepy
and talk more and more slowly.
Now everyone talks fast.
They think fast.
They have repartee.
They say small quick things
not long paragraphs
but the jest, the ready quip,
the swift comeback.
No more do they want the big haunch of meat on the table
because this is heavy
it takes too much time to chew
and you might be chewing when someone says something smart
and you need to say something back at once
so the cuisine comes to be made of things that can be done
in small bites
little bites
served with rose and jasmine water and precious sauces
that were served in fragile little porcelain vessels
to men and women whose slight and scanty clothes
clung to their nimble bodies so closely
that they seemed not to be clothed at all
so that they might rise from the table at any moment
to dance like flowers
like reeds in a summer breeze
as skittish as moths
their hair all powdered with a thousand thousand colors
and trimmed with ribbons and feathers and leaves and grasses
and the large glass windows reached all the way right to the floor
and chandeliers and gold gilt lit up the night
and this—starting with the coffee bean—
is how France came
in time
to produce
Voltaire.

ANOTHER VOICE

Starting with the coffee bean?

FIRST VOICE

Exactly.

26. Lecons des choses: Haute Couture

a runway show

(no longer do the models model wearable clothes:
now unreality is triumphant)

OR ELSE, OR IN ADDITION

A Fashion show of

all nuns

or all Eskimos

or all Hasidic Jews.....

or it starts with runway models

of all sorts

women and then men

and ends with all nuns?

And use Derrida's text on structures with that (below).

A couple of people sit watching him, sucking up every word he says,
while one or two others glance over
roll their eyes
and walk out.

BARBESCO

The structurality of structure—
although it has always been involved,
has always been neutralized or reduced,
and this by a process of giving it
a center
or referring it to a point of presence,
a fixed origin.

The function of this center
was not only to orient, to balance, and to organize the structure—
one cannot in fact conceive of an unorganized structure—
but above all

to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure
would limit what we might call the free play of the structure.

No doubt
that by orienting and organizing the coherence of the system,
the center of a structure permits the free play of its elements
inside the total form.
And even today
the notion of a structure lacking any center
represents
the unthinkable itself.

while Charles Trenet sings.

[Here, there can be an intermission.]

27. Tango

A woman enters in the wire cage
of the sort that is used as a mannequin.

The chef enters and tangoes with her.

Everyone else enters
and there is a wild tango

with the gypsy band
who whirl in, dance with the others,
steal stuff,
spit on people's shadows (as is their wont)
and vanish.

28. Bells

A big wheeled cart pulled by a horse

enters with ten church bells ringing
and crosses and exits the other side.

Or the cart is pulled by several actors.

And is Champagne served in little glasses to audience members?

29. Cruising

Eight people sitting or standing on the quai of the Ile de la Cit , watching and
waving to the bateaux mouche as they pass.

From the middle of the group:

GEORGES, MUSINGLY

Most people think that cruising is pathetic or sordid
but for me
some of my happiest moments
have been spent beyond the fence at the end of the Ile St Louis
in the little park, down on the quay late at night
making love to a stranger
beside dark, swiftly moving water below a glowing city.

30. The Decisive Moment

A beautiful woman enters
everyone stops dead silent
watches her
and then resumes
after she is gone.

31. Trends

ROLAND
Trends
tendencies
schools

avant-gardes
all these are gone from Paris today
gone
today there is no debate
there is instead a sort of watchdog mentality
or worse!
this in a city that long passed for witty
frivolous, openminded,
above all curious
now there are no more questions of new discoveries
Today, all anyone can think to do
is to tell young girls not to wear head scarves to school!
It's a case of complete ossification.

No one bothers to reply, or even to look at him.

Once again, JEAN FRANCOIS speaks,
but this time
he only gets out a few words
before everyone just leaves.

JEAN FRANCOIS
I had an appointment with Michel.
He seemed worried.
I took him out to lunch at a little restaurant on the Parallelo....

Everyone has left.

32. The Breast

A couple crosses,
the guy caresses the woman's breast,
they exit.

33. The Kiss

A guy kisses a woman.
She is really into it
but when it is over
she slaps him.
Then she takes hold of him again
and they embrace again,
and have a long, long kiss,
and then she pulls back, turns, and leaves.

34. Intimacy

A woman alone on stage
One person after another, both men and women,
enter and have a very intimate, absolutely quiet moment with her—
whether one of them whispers into her ear
or touches her hair
or puts a hand on her butt
or has a whispered conversation with her
or kisses her neck—
each one has an extremely intimate moment
and then exits
so it is the next person's turn
and, at the end,
the woman turns and exits, too.

35. The Snuggle

A couple comes out, gets in bed, snuggles.
Others come out one by one
and get in bed and snuggle with them
till there are 10 snuggling in bed together.
Or it begins with two women and ends with only women in bed.

36. Escargots

Women in bed together
while LARTIGUE says:

LARTIGUE

Paris is like an escargot
From where shall we eat it?
Why is Paris an escargot?
Because Paris has 20 districts
and here is a center arondissement.
You can see on the map
the others are surrounding it
spiralling out
in a clockwise direction, like an escargot
So from where shall we eat it?

When he looks back
he finds the girls tangled together
like an escargot on the bed.
He joins them.

37. Le Petomane (Georges or Roland perhaps)

Le Petomane was a French entertainer
who could control the muscles of his abdomen like a bellows
his natural vocal range was 4 notes.
He wore a red cape, black trousers and white cravat,
a pair of white gloves
held in his hand
and he performed
the timid fart of a bride on her wedding night
her lusty raspberry fart one week later
an imposing 10 second fart
which sounded like the cutting of coarse cloth.
He blew out candles and matches

and played various wind instruments.
Any of these things might be done
or maybe he should simply
fart the Marsellaise.

38. The Baguette

the kitchen of a French restaurant with sounds of:
the thwunk of metal in water
hitting the sides of a sink as a pot is washed;
higher harsh clank of one clean saucepan being placed on another;
surprisingly tinny
machine-gun rat a tat tat of a wire whisk in a copper pot;
crashing tent just fell on your head sound
of hot soiled pans being thrown down onto tile to be washed again;
somebody yelling how it is no longer France
where you get the great cuisine but London and San Francisco
and someone else yelling back that that's not true
and they yell back and forth about it

while
ten people enter at once into a tiny space,
— it might be an elevator —
each carrying a baguette.
They navigate around one another
as well as they can in this tiny space.

Out of the pushing, a scuffle develops
with two people shoving one another emphatically
until one person hits the other with a baguette.

This might be funny at first, but eventually
a French guy and Henry square off
and beat each other to a standstill
until they are standing, glaring at one another.

39. You talkin' to me?

Georges—not the one who has fought with Henry—defends himself
as though he were confronting
one challenger after another on the street—
or as though he were an adolescent boy
confronting one challenger after another in his bathroom mirror—
he says:

You talkin' to me?
You talkin' to me?
Eh.
You talkin' to me?
Eh!
You talkin' to me?
Eh, you talkin' to me eh?
Eh, you talkin' to me?
You talkin' to me?
Eh. Eh.
You talkin' to me?
Eh you talkin' to me?
You talkin' to me?
You talkin' to me?
Eh. You talkin' to me?

(He leaves, a chip on his shoulder.)

40. Hate

projected video of the first three minutes
of the movie *La Haine*
(Hate, directed by Mathieu Kassovitz
PolyGram video 1996)
of street riots in the projects in Paris.
One person comes in, sees it, sits, watches,
a second ditto
a third ditto
finally everyone ditto

watch it to the end,
then pick up their chairs and leave

41. How to Save the World

Very quietly, music.
Erik Satie?

BARBESCO
To me what is sad
about life today
is that today
no one is any longer a specialist.
Not long ago you would know
if a parking meter had been burgled
this was a job done by the Hungarians.

ROLAND
If some big bundle of clothes was stolen from a department store
it was done by the Romanians
who had perfected the technique of using large bags
lined with aluminum foil
so that the alarms would not be set off
at the doors of the department store.

BARBESCO
If liquor was being sold clandestinely
it was the work of the Poles
who were never caught at it
except when they themselves drank too much
and made noise and attracted the police.
The theft and resale of cars:

ROLAND
done by refugees from communist eastern Europe.

BARBESCO
Pickpockets:

ROLAND
Algerians

BARBESCO
and a small number of Yugoslavs.
The wholesale traffic in drugs:

ROLAND
North Americans.

BARBESCO
Retail drugs:

ROLAND
Latinos.

BARBESCO
Crack:

ROLAND
West Indians.

BARBESCO
Holdups:

ROLAND
Spaniards.

BARBESCO
Marital violence:

ROLAND
the Portuguese.

BARBESCO
Forgeries, especially of identify papers,
bank transfers, and false apartment leases:

ROLAND

Angolans and Zaireans.

BARBESCO

Indians and Sri Lankans made some efforts
to get into the forgery business
but they proved not as adept as the Angolans and Zaireans.
For some reason.
I don't know.
I make no judgment.
As for the Chinese,

ROLAND

it is said the only laws they violate are their own.

BARBESCO

Although
their habit of sending their dead bodies freeze-dried
back to China was not strictly legal,
and it was not acceptable to serve dead rats in their restaurants.
And nowadays?
Everyone does whatever they want.
There is no such thing as an ethnic speciality.

ROLAND

To me, that's a crime.

BARBESCO

The truth is,
in France
the only ones who work today are the taxi drivers.
Everyone else, frankly,
they are free-loaders,
I hesitate to say it,
nonetheless it is true.
And I don't mean only the foreigners,
I mean also the native born French people themselves,
because you cannot blame the foreigners for everything.

ROLAND

No.

BARBESCO

The truth is
what you see now
is the very slow
but implacable de-Europeanization of Paris—

ROLAND

the appearance of souks and Turkish baths,

BARBESCO

strolling salesmen of totems and necklaces,

ROLAND

graffiti in Turkish and Arabic....

BARBESCO

And, in truth,
the understanding comes to one's consciousness
that the only way France can continue
or Europe for that matter
or anyplace in the world
to function as a beacon of civilization
as anything more than a custodian of its great heritage,
indeed, one might say,
as anything more than a theme park
is by embracing the international,
hybridized culture
that is already thriving within the city limits.

This is the future,

ROLAND

we know this,
or else

BARBESCO

there is no future at all.

ROLAND

But even so

you see

people must work.

BARBESCO

Because

the taxi drivers

cannot do it all.

42. Joie de Vivre

While we hear some wild rai music here
such as Menfi, the second song on the famous album
with Taha, Khaled, and Faudel (1,2,3 Soleils),
the best break dancer in the world break dances.

43. The Arrangement

YVETTE

You know I like to cook

HENRY

Yes

YVETTE

And I like to make apricot confiture

HENRY

Yes

YVETTE

And I straighten up
but not right away

and usually I live in a mess
but then I straighten up later on
only it's not always straightened up.

HENRY
Right.

YVETTE
I do dishes, and I do laundry,
but I'm not good at really cleaning.

HENRY
Unh-hunh.

YVETTE
So that's how it is if you live with me
that's how it will be
that's all.
I just wanted, if we're going to be together, you know,
for everything to be clear.

HENRY
Right.

YVETTE
So you understand about laundry and dishes
and not straightening up
and there are no surprises
like you're not suddenly going to discover
oh, she doesn't straighten up
this will never work out
because I can't stand a mess
I'm sorry I wish I could
I wish I could just rise above it
but chaos makes me crazy
I just fall apart
and I can't go on living with you.

HENRY

Like that.

YVETTE

Right. That's not how it is for me.

Because, moving in with you,
this is a big deal for me,
and I don't want there to be any misunderstandings
because this is a big move for me
and I don't think
after I do this
that there will be any going back
I mean, if a year from now you were to say
oh, you never straighten up
I don't think I can live with that
the point is
I think I'd shoot you.

HENRY

Right.

YVETTE

That's how it is for me.

HENRY

That's it?

YVETTE

Yes.

HENRY

That's all.

YVETTE

Yes. I don't think there's anything else. I think that's everything.

HENRY

The truth is

I can do the laundry, too, and I do dishes.

YVETTE

Oh.

HENRY

So, I think everything's going to be OK.

YVETTE

Oh. Good. Good. That's good then.

HENRY

Right.

Plus, I cook, too.

YVETTE

You cook, too.

HENRY

Right.

YVETTE

Oh.

HENRY

Plus, I love you like crazy.

YVETTE

Oh,

you do.

Oh, good.

Good.

That's good then.

I can accept that.

44. Empathy

American songs: All of Me

There Will Never Be Another You

The night sky.
Starlight.

CATHERINE
I thought
how it was for us
you knew I loved you.

SUMIKO
This is what you always said.

CATHERINE
This is what I meant.

SUMIKO
And yet
whenever I was sad
you just
withdrew.

CATHERINE
I didn't think I did.
I thought I tried to help
or sometimes I put my arms around you
but sometimes it seemed
you needed space
or you felt if I just consoled you
I was condescending toward you
or if I tried to cajole you out of it
you thought I was dismissive of how you felt
or, so
then I would stand back
to give you the space you needed.

SUMIKO
Yes, you would withdraw.
So that I felt
you had no empathy for me.

CATHERINE

But I did.

I did.

SUMIKO

When I was with Michelle

if I was sad or upset

she would just say

oh, I'm so sorry

and put her arms around me

and kiss me.

CATHERINE

You wish I would be like Michelle.

SUMIKO

No.

CATHERINE

You wish you were with Michelle again.

SUMIKO

No.

CATHERINE

I don't understand.

SUMIKO

You don't understand anything I say.

CATHERINE

What are you saying?

SUMIKO

I am saying

you could just say

Sumiko,

I pity you.

I pity you, Sumiko.

CATHERINE

I pity you, Sumiko.

SUMIKO

You see,
it's not so hard.

CATHERINE

That's it?

SUMIKO

That's all I need.
I don't need to be taken out to La Coupole
or some other restaurant
or for you to buy me little dresses
or take me to the oceanside
I just need to know
when I am sad
you pity me

CATHERINE

I pity you, Sumiko.
I pity you.
I pity you.

SUMIKO

I love you, Catherine.

45. The Love of Your Life

JEAN FRANCOIS

Pardon me, is there anyone sitting here?

NANETTE

Not exactly at the moment, but....

JEAN FRANCOIS

You are waiting for someone?

NANETTE

Yes.

JEAN FRANCOIS

And you are expecting this person soon?

NANETTE

Well, I don't know, do I? It could be fifteen minutes.

It could be five years.

JEAN FRANCOIS

Five years?

NANETTE

Possibly. Who knows?

JEAN FRANCOIS

And you are planning to hold onto this table for five years?

NANETTE

If necessary: yes.

JEAN FRANCOIS

This must be an extraordinary person
to wait for this person for five years.

NANETTE

Yes, it could be.

JEAN FRANCOIS

In fact, this person must be the great love of your life,
what else?

NANETTE

Possibly.

JEAN FRANCOIS

Possibly! What do you mean possibly?

NANETTE

We have not met yet.

JEAN FRANCOIS

So you sit here day after day....

NANETTE

At the same table....

JEAN FRANCOIS

At the same table

holding onto an empty chair

in the hope that the great love of your life will pass by

happen to glance at you sitting here alone,

notice perhaps the striking color of your eyes

ask to join you for a coffee

engage you in conversation

so that all your hopes and desires are suddenly

miraculously fulfilled

you fall deeply in love in an instant

you leave the cafe together

and from that moment on

you are never without this person?

NANETTE

Yes.

JEAN FRANCOIS

I see. May I join you for a coffee while you wait? Because all the other tables seem to be full.

NANETTE

Yes, I suppose it's alright. Yes. Please.

JEAN FRANCOIS

Allow me to introduce myself.

I am Jean Francois
and I am the great love of your life.

Fireworks.

46. Ecstasy

The Last Scene of the Piece:
a multicultural Folies Bergere
with the entire cast
both men and women
parading in, in feathered costumes doing classic poses,
and moving into slinky moves and high kicks
and dance moves out of Africa,
to wild, raucous, celebratory rai music
such as Khalliouni, the first song on the famous album
with Taha, Khaled, and Faudel (1,2,3 Soleils):
Paris leads the way into the future
the culture without walls
pure joie de vivre.

as they all exit at the end
we are left with two women kissing,
like the classic Doisneau photograph
and then
lights out.

Charles Mee's work has been made possible by the support
of Richard B. Fisher and Jeanne Donovan Fisher.